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TRAINING FOR POWER, OR FOR MONEY?

BY IRENE T. MYERS, PH.D.

AN interesting article by Professor C. M. Woodward was published in *Harper's Weekly* of December 1, 1900. It gives a general survey of the century's educational achievement, but with particular reference to the relation between pure science and the industrial arts. In the early part of the last century, he tells us, there was no apparent connection between them; but by the middle of the century the minute study of the laws governing the material world had produced tangible results. The application of these laws has stimulated industrial activities, and the industrial demands in turn had stimulated and encouraged scientific investigation. As a consequence, education extended its horizon; and, although a gap was still left between them, the industrial life and that of the schools came nearer together.

By the middle of the century, a great educational advance had been made beyond the old traditional training. The experiments in the laboratories, the analyses, tests, and examinations of real things, had brought the pupils into contact with the concrete. They were accustomed to the use of the hand as a co-worker with the brain, so that the next step — the training of the physical powers — was not difficult. Industrial conditions, as has been said, were pushing education in the same direction, in that they were demanding a higher order of mechanical skill. The problem was to make connection between the work of the schools and the work of every-day life.

In the attempt to solve this problem, manual training came into existence a little later as a distinct educational factor. It was not, even in the beginning, intended to be a training merely along certain narrow lines of practical work; but it was expected to give a command of the hand and a knowledge of mechanics that would be generally useful. It is true, however, that the insistence of industrial demands made it in its early days simply the most direct line by which a boy might reach self-support, and this without definite reference to the mental or moral fibre produced in his progress. It remained for manual training itself, as it became acquainted with its own possibilities, to show that by developing the physical we develop also the mental powers; to demonstrate, in fact, that the human nature is, in the last analysis, a unit, and that, when we train the hand intelligently, we may train through it the whole being. The result of this demonstration is that our educational leaders have a conception, as yet partially realized, of a unified educational system

which shall recognize the unified human nature with which it deals. It is unfortunate that there are still those to whom the only appeal made by manual training is a material one. Thus to circumscribe it takes away from it its right to be regarded as an educational factor. It confines it to the limited instruction of the pupil, and loses sight of his development. It restricts it to the making of artisans, and ignores the possibility of a more precious spiritual handiwork. The name *manual* training is, therefore, misleading when we consider that, as a true educational agent, it must aim to develop a complete manhood.

The character of Mr. Woodward's article would forbid his making a detailed examination of the specific methods of manual training; but there is one, to which he alludes with commendation, which deserves particular consideration,— because of the end for which it strives, because of the interest with which it is now being regarded by educators, and because it is reaching out through all grades of the public school system. I refer to that educational handwork for which we are directly indebted to the Swedes. It retains its old Swedish name of Sloyd (*Slöjd*) because etymologically in this name is implied not only the work of the hand, but also of the head. Consequently, the system for which it stands does not suffer from the confusing limitation caused by the use of the term "manual." Yet since the name "manual training," however inadequate in its significance, has been generally adopted among us, the insistence by the advocates of sloyd that their system should keep its distinctive name would seem to need the justification of distinctive principles. They claim that its principles are distinctive, and certainly not without reason, when so eminent an authority as Professor William James of Harvard can say, "Of the various systems of manual training, so far as wood-work is concerned, the Swedish sloyd system, if I may have an opinion in such matters, seems to me by far the best, psychologically considered." And, further, we find Dr. C. Hanford Henderson of Philadelphia, saying: "In estimating the several forms of manual training, I have come to believe that the Swedish form, sloyd, has some advantages over the more formal Russian manual training, in giving better gymnastics in its movements and a more human interest in its occupations. A finished article* makes a stronger appeal to the childish sympathy than the abstract exercises of manual training proper. It is psychologically truer, and, I believe, morally more effective." And again, in discriminating between sloyd and other forms of manual training, Dr. Henderson says: "The term 'educational' is often given to the earlier technical work, and was sincerely given by the people who introduced it; but they meant something quite different from what we mean when we use the term. As opposed to the making of something that would have a direct market value, the work was industrially educative rather than industrially productive; and the earlier teachers of manual training devised abstract joints and exercises by way of models, in order to emphasize this difference. They feared that the schools might

* The Sloyd model.

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some time become factories, and start out on the dangerous road of self-support. But the real difference is more profound than this. The earlier manual training was undertaken in order to give a skill to be used in industry; it was *a* training *of* the hand. The later, or educational, manual training is undertaken to give a skill of organism to be used in life; it is a training *through* the hand. The one motive is technical. The other is human." The one is a training for money, the other for power.

Since the Swedish system holds before it this definite educational rather than industrial aim, we should give it serious consideration. It can perhaps less rightfully lay claim to distinctive principles than was the case when it was first introduced into the United States, for it has undoubtedly exercised an influence upon the evolution of the old manual training; and, in many places where it is not directly recognized, it has nevertheless modified the character of the manual work. It is itself the result of an evolution through phases of manual training very similar to those which have appeared, and which in some places still exist in our schools. Before it came to us, however, it had been systematized and psychologically tested. The principles for which it then stood, and for which it stands to-day, are of general character, adaptable to varying conditions of time and place, and are under no circumstances to be mistaken for specific rules. It insists, for instance, upon a rational progression in its exercises,— a progression involving not so much manual skill as mental effort,— and it has exemplified this principle in a series of models; but, where a Swedish model would be meaningless or useless to an American child (as, for instance, a Swedish mallet for washing linen in a running brook), it has been replaced by an object involving the same logical progression of exercises for the hand and brain, the usefulness of which will also be apparent to the American boy who makes it.

Twelve years ago Mrs. Quincy A. Shaw, of Boston, determined to test the educational value of sloyd for American children. She placed in charge of her experiment earnest, devoted Swedish teachers, who began in a tentative way, and with a truly scientific spirit, to adapt the Swedish system to the requirements of American children. The experiment, which has been watched with interest, was unique; and the result, to which Professor Woodward alludes, has received the highest commendation. In like manner the system is being adapted to the needs of the Cuban children. Three Cuban men were last year trained in Mrs. Shaw's Boston sloyd school (for the free training of teachers), and these men are expected to aid in introducing into their island an educational factor which has been carefully considered with reference to the Cuban people. These are only two illustrations, from many that might be given, of the effort made by the advocates of sloyd to build upon a sound philosophical basis.

As has been said, the logical progression of exercises is a fundamental principle in sloyd. To use familiar phraseology, it would lead the pupil from the simple to the complex, from the easy to the

difficult, from the known to the unknown; and all the time, by its appeal to his interest in the object he is fashioning, it would obtain his co-operation instead of encountering his opposition.

To go further into detail, it has been recognized that, in securing a logical progression, several things must be considered. First, there must be no abrupt change from one manual problem to another. The second must introduce the third, and be itself introduced by the first. It would be as reasonable to transfer a child, immediately from addition to decimal fractions as from his first simple model to a cabinet, or to begin his instruction in geography by introducing him to the boundaries, rivers, and cities of Russia, as to plunge him into some complicated manual problem for which he has received no preparation. The teacher may, in either instance, by dint of repetition and explanation, bring the pupil up to a mechanical expression of the facts; but no one should be deceived into supposing that the child has thereby been educated. Secondly, it has been recognized by the teachers of sloyd that, whenever an exercise has become mechanical, it has lost its value as an agent for the development of the child, and is making of him simply a machine for economic purposes. For this reason an exercise is changed, before it has reached the point of senseless repetition, for another introducing fresh problems which will promote his mental activity. Again, sloyd appeals to the interest and self-respect of the pupil by insisting that each piece of work be a finished article, the usefulness of which will be apparent to him. The spontaneous impulse of a child never leads him to make simply parts of things, and the manual training that devotes itself to abstract exercises, distinct from completed objects, ignores this natural impulse and deprives itself of an impelling educational force. Further, in addition to arousing the pupil's interest, the completed work must appeal to the affections, to the higher moral faculties. It must be something a boy will like to give to father or mother or to any one whom he loves, something which will make him feel that he is a contributor to the comfort of those about him. With this end in view in the fashioning of his model, his mind is likely to be full of healthful activity. Thus the advocate of sloyd rests his case upon *ethical* as well as upon psychological grounds. He does not believe, with some manual training teachers, that it matters little what exercise engages a pupil's attention, provided only that the work be well done. On the contrary, he holds that the pupil's thought or motive, while engaged upon his work, is a matter of vital importance. The mere acquirement of manual skill or dexterity can be counted upon to sharpen the mental faculties. It will train to precision, accuracy, and concentration; but, when a vicious nature lies back of the manual skill, it is possible, by means of such limited training, to make only a more dangerous villain.

Recent events are calling public attention, more imperatively than ever, to the moral influence of the work of our public schools. We consider these, and rightly, as the legitimate training places for the great body of our citizens; but, since the President of the

United States has met his death at the hand of a man who, throughout his boyhood, had enjoyed all the privileges of these schools, is it not time to consider whether, in the training here offered to the youth of the country, we are putting the emphasis in the right place? The advocates of sloyd do not claim that through its influence alone all the weakness of a complicated school system would be corrected. They do confidently offer, however, by this means, a supplementary form of training, well calculated to supply some of the most conspicuous deficiencies in our system of public education.

It is the aim of sloyd to associate in the child's mind growth in skill with the ability to be useful. It would utilize *all* the inherent powers in the development of character, for it would direct these powers into such activities as are likely to react most helpfully upon the child's nature. It would use the mental exactness and fine discrimination which it develops, as a means through which he may have a perception of absolute right and wrong. Indeed, it is only in so far as manual exercises have a moral, as well as a physical and mental significance that they are regarded in sloyd as truly educational.

Since sloyd has before it the definite aim of training for power, and is founded upon principles of general application, it would seem that only for very good reasons should it be limited, as is sometimes suggested, to the first steps in manual training. If there were nothing else to testify in its favor, a recognition of the vital importance of interest, in promoting mental activity, which has established the elective system in our universities and colleges, should give sloyd its merited extension into high schools and normal schools; for its principles do not confine it to simple constructions or to ordinary elementary tools. It starts with these, necessarily, but between forty and fifty tools are employed in following the exercises which, in the Boston Sloyd Training School, have been adapted to the needs and powers of children from twelve to fifteen years of age; and in the course of work, as here arranged, seventy-two different exercises are involved in the making of thirty models. The high school course, as that of the grammar school, is arranged with reference to progression, variety, and motive, but with exercises which present more complex problems, in harmony with the increased power of the pupils. It is true that sloyd, as developed in this country, has been adapted only to work in wood, and may, because of this, seem to have a narrow range; but in making this selection of material, the teachers have profited by the efforts of the Swedes, who have experimented with twelve different kinds of sloyd, each of which has been submitted to tests in order to determine the relative educational value. This was done because with the Swedes, as elsewhere, the time to be devoted to sloyd was limited. Its friends desired and claimed for it only a place among other recognized educational factors. Consequently, it was necessary to find out what kind of work best satisfied the educational requirements. The reasons for the selection of work in wood seemed valid to the teachers of sloyd in America, and accordingly were acted upon in

adapting the exercises to the American schools. They do not, however, fail to see the value of other kinds of sloyd, where conditions make it possible to extend the work.

It has been almost thirty years since Herr Salomon in Sweden began patiently and experimentally to systematize educational handwork in wood. From that beginning its growth has been continuous. The statistics of the present year show that in Stockholm alone 681 places are arranged for sloyd ~~work~~. Here, in general, sloyd is optional, but it is obligatory in the highest grade of the grammar schools. All of the large cities in Sweden are similarly equipped, and the work has been extended into the country schools. In Norway, sloyd is compulsory in the elementary schools. It is permeating the schools of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. It is adopted in Russia instead of the so-called Russian system of manual training. It has a healthy growth in Canada and Australia and in parts of South America. In short, the completed statistics would show that it was a far-sighted wisdom which, having seen a need in our system of education, provided the means for the introduction of sloyd into the public schools of the United States.